

JOSH'S STORY ... 4

when I arrived, my mom was in the hospital, **unconscious**, and **attached** to a **tangle** of intravenous drips ... the DTs would **set in over** the next few days ... it was shocking, but **equally** shocking was **what** I saw when I went to her condo ... **the place** was so bad it looked like a **crime scene** ... the couch had a blackened depression where **she'd been sitting** for God knows how long

there were overflowing ashtrays, real and improvised, and **trash** everywhere ... it smelled like urine and nicotine ... there were burns on the couch and a four-foot patch of blackened carpet that looked like someone had **spent** several days rubbing saltwater and [?] into the floor **on purpose**

it **took** a month **for** me to **even** begin **sorting it all out** ... I **arranged for** David **to** complete his jail sentence in the condo **under house arrest** ... when my mother stabilized, I **got her transferred** to a nursing facility ... the only one that would accept her **with no insurance** ... but that was just the beginning

with my grandparents **gone**, it was **clear** that she and David **literally** had no idea how to survive **by themselves** ... now she **faced** destitution from all the **medical bills** ... and David was **on the verge of** serious jail time with **one more screw-up** ... it began to **dawn on** me that I couldn't go back home to California ... someone had to help them **get back on their feet** ... and **there** was nobody **left but** me ... and **that's how** I **wound up spending** four months in Florida, as a reluctant social worker for my own family

JOSH'S STORY ... 5

hi. I've got a **kind of a** strange situation. my mom lives at 240 Bedford J. and she's in the hospital... .. it's a typical Wednesday. my mom's still in the nursing home ... but there are **various** documents **that** I need to **pick up** from the condo ... **the problem is**, Century Village is a rather heavily fortified retirement community, **set up** like **some kind of a** geriatric Army base with many thousands of octogenerians housed in blocks and protected from solicitors and terrorists alike by a big wall perimeter ... you can't **get past** the tightly monitored gates **without having someone add** your name to a list or flashing a residence pass

David recently lost his own pass and began resorting to commando tactics, **sneaking in** through gaps in the golf-course fence or scaling the wall behind the gas station ... I can't get on the stupid list **myself** **since** you can **only** add **visitors'** names **by calling from within** your house ... so my mom can't call me in from the nursing home where she's living now ... **instead**, I have to **rely on** her neighbors who **are easily confused** and don't like to **rock the boat**

hi, **it's Josh calling** again ... so I called my mom and she couldn't really **figure out** any other **way for me to get in** so, I don't know, I wanted to try to return to **the idea of maybe you calling** me in **somehow** ... the neighbor does not call me in, **which** is nothing new ... but after half an hour, I **manage** to convince one of the commanding officers of the gatehouse regime **to let me through**

inside the walls, Century Village is like its own city ... there are acres of condos amongst **man-made** lakes ... and **the whole thing** is serviced by a **pharmacy** and **general store** ... there are several clubhouses and a **shuttle** system that takes residents to **nearby** shopping centers ... in Century Village, where **the entire place** knows when you've **put** your car in the **wrong** parking **spot**, imagine the **impression made by** my mother, drunk on the shuttle **at noon**, or David and a wife-beater **arguing** with his pill-popping girlfriend on the grass **at midnight** ... **needless to say**, they **made for** very **conspicuous** neighbors at 240 Bedford J.

JOSH'S STORY ... 6

it's hard to say exactly how the woman I remember from childhood **became the one** sitting with me today ... but **there's no question** a lot of it **had to do with** that scenario in Minneapolis, which was **this one** night when some **strangers showed up at** the house

these people came to the door and told me they **were having car trouble** ... asked me if my husband **was** home and did we have jumper cables ... and it all seemed legit to me because I couldn't **get my car started** that day, it was really really cold ... so they wanted to **use the phone**, which sounded logical, **although** there was a **pay phone** on the corner and I **should have told** them to go there or asked them for the number and never **let them in** the house ... what I **should have done** and what I did do are two **different** things ... **so anyway**, they came in and they **must have heard** him **coming up** the pathway because snow was packed on the walkway ... he walked in and **that's when** the guy **put** the gun to my head and told him, don't come **any further** or I'm gonna blow this bitch away

I was there that night too, I **actually answered** the door ... I remember how cold it was when the couple came inside ... I didn't see him but outside was a third man ... **there's** always a third man at a hit, the police later said ... but I didn't know what was happening ... I was in the other room watching ... with David when Sonny came home and drew his own 9mm ... I heard gunfire and looked up to see bullets coming through the walls near David ... I took him out of his high chair, **hid** in the bathroom and watched the hitmen **out the window** running **off past** the icicles in the alley

in the other room, Sonny was down ... my mother was so **frantic**, she couldn't remember his name when she called 911 ... I had to **get on the line** and explain **to** the paramedics where we lived ... I was nine, or I would be the next day ... a few weeks **later** Sonny died in the hospital ... that's why my father got full custody of me and Ethan ... David was Sonny's kid, so he stayed with my mother ... we saw them during summer for a few years, but **things** were never the same ... I don't **even** remember **the turning point**, but **eventually** she stopped working and we stopped going ... I've always **assumed** those missing years were **rough** for my mother and David ... but while in Florida, I **discovered** they were worse than I thought

JOSH'S STORY ... 7

a few days later, I **bring up** those missing years with David ... for the first time I **get a clear picture of what life was like** for him ... living with a grieving mother who's drinking more and more ... and **getting caught up with** a string of abusive men

they weren't good people, they were... I mean, they weren't the worst people in the world, **either** but, you know, they were **in and out of jail**, beating up mom, **threatening** to kill her, threatening to kill me, you know ... when I got fourteen years old or something, I **was thrown into** the china glass cabinet my mom had by her boyfriend Mark ... he was so drunk I **ended up fighting** him that night and I finally I got them to restrain him to this chair

it's a **weird** feeling when you're **that** young and you gotta **stick up for** your mother because you're the only... you're like the man of the household ... and if you don't **stand up for** that, like, you know, then all this other crazy **shit** is gonna happen ... having cops come, called to the house **all the time** ... and then watching her because, you know, she **had feelings for** him, **tell** the cops, like, oh no nothing's happening or hide him out or shit like that ... and you, **at that age** when you're going through all that ... you know it's not right, so you try to like **act like** your life isn't bad ... you try to like act like your life IS normal ... you know, you **hide** all that **away from** the rest of the world

I was scared to have people, friends **of mine**, come **over** and sleep over at the house, because **the average** kid, you know, it's gonna be **freaked out** ... you try, you know, you warn them **ahead of time**, like look, the situation is grim, you're gonna hear shit **you're not supposed to** hear, you're gonna see shit you definitely **shouldn't be seeing** at this age ... and it's real, it's right there in front of you ... cops **might be called**, violent acts might occur around you ... you just gotta, you know, you're like a soldier ... and so then the kids who are doing that, coming over, **become regulars**, end up just as fucked up as you

JOSH'S STORY ... 8

time can be merciless in South Florida ... it's easy for a numbing routine to **develop** down here ... **which is exactly what** happens as I spent countless hours ... **xeroxing** medical records and driving forty miles to **fix** the kitchen **sink** because David **can't quite figure out** how to **operate** the plumber's wrench ... **every time there's progress on** some small thing ... I look up and realize the horizon is still miles **away**

but **at least** my mom **hasn't been drinking** ... I was sure that as soon as she could walk she'd take the **pocket cash** I gave her **each** week ... and convince someone to **smuggle booze** into the nursing home ... it really wouldn't be **that** hard, this is a woman who could **figure out** how to get hooch if she were **trapped** in Apollo 13 ... but she's **resisted so far, which** means one **less** thing **to worry about** ... it also means I can talk to her without the sway of alcohol clouding every conversation ... I can ask her questions that would have been impossible before, like, how exactly did this all begin?

you know, **it's hardly like** I woke up one day and said, gee I'd like to become an alcoholic ... **there is absolutely no question** that it was **brought on** by the... my post-traumatic stress disorder ... flashbacks of the scenario in Minneapolis, vivid, **like** I was experiencing it **all over again**

the scenario in Minneapolis, that's another great part of the story ... **one** that I **haven't** told you about yet ... **part of the reason** for my parents' **messy** divorce was that when my dad left **for** his NASA job, my mom **was supposed to** stay **behind, finish up** our school year, sell the house and meet him in Pasadena ... **instead,** she met a man named Sonny in a Minneapolis nightclub ... he was a Cherokee, six-foot-five and lean, **charming** but **moody** and often carrying his guitar, he was **the very opposite of** my father

Sonny **moved in** and my mother **never made it to** Pasadena ... Sonny was also a drug dealer, sometimes his friends **would** fill the house, **partying full-steam** and **staying up late** ... I remember

being babysat by Sonny's stoned Sioux friends, showing them my dinosaur dioramas and trying to convince them to play dungeons and dragons with me

JOSH'S STORY ... 9

this is the picture of my mom that sort of made me upset ... it's actually a picture I've seen around for a long time ... and this is my mom probably when she's thirty years old ... you know, my mother was this happy, healthy, you know, attractive woman, and it reminded me, you know, what it meant that my mom has wound up this way ... she's unrecognizable when you compare her to this picture

JOSH'S STORY ... 10

I find it frustrating that she's not more frustrated ... well, as far as nursing is concerned, it's sort of stuck there ... we might as well make the best of it ... at least have a few people you can talk to ... but I mean emotionally, I mean you haven't actually been too upset about your situation... outwardly

what am I supposed to do, Josh? like, cry all the time? throw a fit all the time? ... no, I mean I was glad to see that in that sense you were kind of bounced back to normal, much faster than I thought ... but to me, when I come here, and for years, I come here and you have no idea that to me and Ethan, this is not normal at all, the way you and David live

it's kind of always, like, you know, something happens that makes things a little bit worse but then... and it seems worse, but then you adjust to it and all of a sudden that becomes normal ... that doesn't ever translate into some kind of action, I guess ... well, it has, and then I put out this great effort and then it's just, like, I start to lose the energy and I can't get it back, and I don't seem to be able to get it back, you know, I get more and more depressed and, you know... I don't know how to explain it, I really don't ... if I

knew the answers to these questions, Josh, I'd be a very mentally healthy person

this quality **of hers**, this ability to **adapt to** anything, **is what got** her here **in the first place** ... my mom adapted to each new rung in the ladder and then the next step down didn't seem so bad ... take, for example, the hurricane that hit Florida a month before the paramedics came for my mom

as the category-five storm was making landfall, David decided to **go for a drive** ... he **was pulled over** by the cops, **which** wasn't **that** surprising **since** the car had no registration, no insurance, no working tail-lights and a **cracked windshield** ... David, who had no license, and maybe **had taken** some pills **to boot**, **had been** pulled over twice already **for having** that car on the road ... he **was thrown in jail** for a week and my mother **was left all alone**

I mean, I was sitting here, in total darkness, I mean, there weren't **even** any street-lights **on** was falling down ... everything was so chaotic and then of course I started drinking **out of control** and that was, you know, it just, you know, I started dancing, I just wanted a little **relief** from this insanity, and **it made me even** more insane

how come you didn't call me during that whole period? ... maybe because I really didn't know what to say, Josh ... **I wish I had known** to come down, I mean, that's, you know, and then especially **as it got worse**, I mean, **I wish somebody had called** and **Ethan and I could have come** out ... yeah, I understand that, Josh, but it's just like... ... I wasn't saying that just to **make you feel guilty about not calling** me, I was just trying ... no, it's hard to explain, it's just, (what the hell is that?) one more time one more time one more time

all right, I **wouldn't have minded** ... well, I didn't know about it ... I **would have rather done** that than ... **wind up** here for four months ... yeah, I know that. well, it's part of the whole cycle, you know. you don't wanna tell anybody else because if you tell somebody else, you're telling yourself, **which** is the last thing you wanna do